

Sunday School Lesson.

SUNDAY, SEPT., 6.

DEATH OF SAUL, AND JONATHAN.

I Sam. 31:1-13.

Motto Text—"There is a way that seemeth right unto man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."—Prov. 14:12.

Four or five years have passed since our last lesson. Saul's repenting lasted but a short time, and he was again pursuing David. And David's faith in God's sovereignty failed, and with it, of course, his courage, his honor and his love for God's people. He joined himself and his six hundred warriors to the worst enemies of Israel, doing thus on a large scale what Benedict Arnold afterwards did. He marched with his men in the army of the Philistines, and had it not been for the contempt of their lords for such a renegade and their refusal to believe that a man who was willing to fight his own people could be true to any one David would have been compelled either to fight against Israel, or to have been guilty of treachery against Achish on the field of battle. His whole course in this thing was base and cowardly, and the Bible does not excuse nor justify nor palliate it. God in his mercy saved David from the crowning act of infamy by sending him away from the battlefield.

"Now the Philistines fought against Israel."—They had come further north than usual to the great plain of Esdraelon, where it is thought they hoped to get control of the route of the caravans to Egypt. They were camped at Shunem, the very spot where Gideon and his three hundred men won their great victory. Saul's army was southeast of them on the slopes of Mt. Gilboa. This plain was also the scene of Barak's great victory. Twice under their judges Israel won great battle against tremendous odds on this very spot. Now they come again to fight here with the king whom they had chosen for the express reason that he should lead their armies to victory.

"And the men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and fell down slain in Mt. Gilboa."—The army of Israel seems to have been very badly placed from a military point of view. Their line of retreat led over Gilboa. The Israelites seem to have fled in a panic, those who still maintained order rallying around Saul and his sons. They retreated fighting as they went. Jonathan and Abinadab and Nechishua were killed; one young son was not in the battle. The death of Jonathan is worthy more than a passing notice. He was so brave, so true, so kindly and loving, so wise in the most difficult positions, so altogether noble. From what we are told of him, he was very far superior to David in moral character and in unswerving trust in God. His faith never faltered—he never fled to Achish and offered his services to the Philistines to fight against Israel. There is no stain on the purity of his young manhood. And yet he died fighting to save his father and his country on the mountain of Gilboa, and David lived to long years of glory and power. That Saul richly deserved defeat and death, we all feel—but the noble Jonathan! We can only say, as he surely would have said, "It is the Lord, let him do as seemeth him good." "He doeth his will among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of earth, and none can stay his hand and say unto him, what doeth thou?" Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?

Yet is there a Christian who, if given his choice, would not prefer Jonathan's death to David's life?

He died fighting bravely for his country, left behind him an unstained name, and took with him to glory a noble and unflinching faith in God. David lived to power and glory and great wealth, but to fall into terrible sin which has given the enemies of the Lord in all ages great occasion to blaspheme; to die at last old, feeble, and suffering after years of awful punishment for his great sin—punishment which brought death an infamy among his children and the keen anguish to his great loving heart. Who would not have preferred to die with Jonathan than to have lived to weep tears of blood over the bier of Absalom?

"The battle went sore against Paul"—against him personally. The chief attack of the enemy was upon him and his sons, and they had already fallen. Though wounded, he maintained the fight for some time longer, hoping no doubt, to be killed by the enemy. But at last the archers were pressing so closely upon him, he saw he was in danger of being captured and therefore said to his armor-bearer, "Draw thy sword and thrust me through."—The nations in those days were given to torturing prisoners, and it is evident this is what Saul dreaded. For the manner in which he was killed would make no difference in their getting possession of his dead body. "But his armor-bearer would not, for he was afraid."—It was his duty to protect the king's life, and no punishment would be considered too severe for him had he taken it. In fact after Saul had committed suicide by fixing the hilt of his sword in the ground and falling upon it, he was afraid to live and killed himself also.

"So Saul died"—the first suicide of whom we read in Scripture, as Judas was the last. A noble couple truly, whose example so many fools in this day are found to imitate. "All his men"—means all his personal attendants, no doubt, who fought round their master to the last. When the people in the adjacent country saw the thoroughness of the defeat, they left their cities and fled in a panic. And well they might—for capture meant either death or being carried off into slavery, as well as the destruction of their property. This verse is a parenthesis telling the after results of the battle. The narrative then goes back to the scene of Saul's death.

"And it came to pass on the morrow."—Their putting off stripping the slain until the next day shows that Saul and those with him had maintained the fight until late in evening. "And they cut off his head"—as proof of their victory and his death. After it was sent around the cities it was fastened in the temple of Dagon at Ashdod. Ashtaroth was their goddess. It was the custom to hang the spoils of their enemies in the temples of their gods as acknowledging them to be the authors of their victory. "And they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan."—Beth-shan was a city which the Canaanites still inhabited, near the battlefield. The bodies of his sons hung there also. "They were hung on the wall that all passers-by might join in exulting over the defeat and disgrace of Israel. Beth-shan is now called Bessan.

Vs 11, 12 and 13.—Forty years before Saul had saved Jabesh-Gilead when besieged by Nahash. The people had never forgotten the energy, skill and bravery he had displayed in coming to their rescue and after so many years they have an opportunity of showing their gratitude. Jabesh-Gilead was a city of Manasseh beyond the Jordan, ten miles from his victorious foes. They went at night in order to surprise the enemy and make sure of securing the bodies. Why they burned the flesh it is hard to say, both the suppositions usually given seeming insufficient. If their object had been to keep the Philistines from recovering the bodies, they would have burned the bones also. If as Ploufart thinks, the flesh was offensive, it would seem

instead of taking the bones and burying the flesh, they would have buried both under the tree. How noble Saul appeared when first we met him, in what terrible gloom his life went out. Such is the fate of all human goodness tried by the great dangers of prosperity and power, when unsustained by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

Association Meetings in Kentucky for 1903.

- First District S. S. Convention, Pembroke, May 21.
- South District Association, Lancaster, June 17.
- Green River Valley S. S. Convention, Central City, June 18.
- Consolidated S. S. Convention, Lexington, June 25.
- Union District S. S. Convention, Bowling Green, June 25.
- Y. M. S. S. Convention, Sturgis, June 25.
- Central District S. S. Convention, Carrollton, June 25.
- Central District Association, Bardonia, July 9.
- G. R. & C. V. S. S. Convention, Gracey, July 14.
- London District S. S. Convention, Consolidated Association, Cynthiana, July 15.
- W. K. G. V. S. S. Convention, Bethel School, Hardwood, July 16.
- First District Association, Trenton, July 28.
- Green River S. S. Convention, Western Green Valley S. S. Convention, Howard Creek Association, Sallsville, July 22.
- South District S. S. Convention, Davisboro, July 23.
- Young Men's State Association, New Liberty S. S. Convention, Payson, July 31.
- General Association, Danville, August 12.
- Liberty Association, Green River Valley Association, Mt. Pleasant District Association, Richmond, Sept. 3.
- Mt. Calvary District Association, Irvington, Sept. 5.
- Aid District Association, Louisville, Sept. 8.
- Little R. & C. V. Association, Mt. Zion Callaway co. Sept. 8.
- Union Association, Zion District Association, South Union, Sept. 10.
- Liberty S. S. Convention, London District Association, Altamont, Sept. 17.
- Howard Creek S. S. Convention, Stamping Ground, Sept. 24.
- Baptist Women's Educational Conv'n, Franklin, Oct. 1.
- B. W. K. C. of L. R. & C. V. Association, Dawson, Oct. 15.

BAPTIST WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL CONVENTION.

Dear Sisters: We are preparing to entertain you the 1st of Oct. and hope to have a large representative delegation of the Baptist women of Kentucky. Bring your religion along and let us see that you come up to the full status of your name. Kindly notify us of your coming in order to save confusion in assigning homes. Yours in the work, W. C. Allen, Pastor Alpha Baptist Church, Franklin Ky.

NOTICE.

By the resignation of our beloved pastor the Rev. C. G. Mishback, A. M. B. D. July 1st, 1903 our pulpit is now vacant. The undersigned were appointed as a committee to correspond with various ministers and invite such to appear before the church as they think would meet the approval of the church. We will be responsible only to such as we invite to visit us. Jno. Loving, W. C. Jackson, Sandy Duncan, Edw. Moppin, Jas. R. Price, Wm. B. Ferguson, H. C. Jones, Chairman Pulpit Committee, Bowling Green, Ky.

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